



READY FIRST BRIGADE NEWSLETTER

COL Sean MacFarland, Commander
1LT Will Bardenwerper, PAO
SGT Michael Hartman, PA NCO



The American and Iraqi flags wave over FOB Sykes, new home of the Ready First Combat Team.



Hills behind the city of Tal Afar, pictured from the 14th century Ottoman castle, TF 2-37 HQ.



SSG Cagins of 1/501st MP Co. distributes snacks children in Abu Mariyah.

Tal Afar Not The Iraq You'd Expect

By: SGT Hartman

When asked what they think Iraq is like, most people respond with words like dry, flat, or hot. Yet in the northwestern Nineveh province around the town of Tall Afar and Forward Operating Base Sykes, new home of the Ready First Combat Team, the landscape differs from these perceptions.

The first thing one notices is that terrain isn't flat like much of Iraq. Two mountain ranges dominate the otherwise barren terrain; one near Tal Afar and another near the smaller town of Sinjar. The second thing one can't help but notice is that it isn't hot during this time of year. In fact, during the winter months it's even possible to occasionally see snow atop the mountains.

Perhaps most surprising has been the rain. At times the weather here has more closely resembled the German weather we left behind rather than the desert weather we expected. Tal Afar is currently in its rainy season and the ground has often been reduced to a sticky, clumpy mud.

Less than a year ago Tal Afar was in the hands of ruthless terrorists. However, our predecessors, the 3rd ACR, conducted a large operation in September in which many enemy fighters were killed or captured. The RFCT has continued this momentum and has already nabbed some high value targets.

Soldiers in our AO (area of operations) can now devote more time to training the Iraqi Security Forces as well as on humanitarian projects designed to improve the quality of life of the townspeople in addition to their traditional combat tasks.



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1-37AR
"BANDITS"



Bandits move into Iraq

The Bandits recently assumed responsibility for almost 25,000 square miles of northwestern Iraq, including over 200 kilometers of the Syrian border.

We completed a successful movement from Germany, through Kuwait, and into Iraq. Now based out of Sinjar, a city comprised primarily of Yezidis and Kurds, along with some Sunni Arabs, the Bandits are working hard with Iraqi Security Forces to provide security to the population.

The Bandits have been conducting varied missions in their AO (area of operations), ranging from traditional combat patrols to civil affairs efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the inhabitants of the region.

We would like to thank all of you back at home for your continued support. Your letters and packages provide a great boost to our already high morale and for that we are thankful.



A ribbon cutting ceremony celebrating the new opening of the Gaulat Health Clinic.



A group of children smile for the camera outside the new Gaulat Clinic.



CPT Dixon stands with Iraqi Army and community leaders at the Thrai al Kharah Health Clinic opening.



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2-37AR “IRON DUKES”



Relationship Building in Tal Afar

The soldiers of Task Force 2-37 AR “Iron Dukes” immediately jumped into the action in Tal Afar, Iraq where the unit recently replaced 2nd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. The soldiers patrol daily in coordination with both the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police.

The soldiers of TF Iron Duke spend much of their time out on patrol, talking with the citizens of Tal Afar. Already, the Dukes have picked up where 3rd ACR (the previous unit) left off, with projects to improve the electricity, water purification, and roads in the city. On a relationship based on the mutual respect between the citizens of Tal Afar, the Iraqi Security Forces, and the U.S. Forces, American soldiers interact freely addressing problems the Iraqis in the region face on a daily basis.



Below: SSG Paul, from Team Warrior, provides security on a patrol with his Iraqi Police Counterpart in downtown Tal Afar.

The people of Tal Afar work closely with the Coalition Forces to rid the town of anti-Iraqi forces. Local nationals often give patrols information about insurgents working in the area, which has led to the capture and detention of several AIF (Anti-Iraqi Forces) in the past week. On February 15, the Iraqi police received a tip from a local national in Tal Afar about the location of a known insurgent leader. The Tal Afar Police responded, and subsequently captured the insurgent leader. Based on the relationship already laid from joint patrols and operations, the Iraqi Police then turned him over to the 1st Platoon from TM Aggressor.

The soldiers of the Iron Dukes continue to build relationships everyday as they patrol the streets of Tal Afar, with the delicate balance of conducting joint missions with the Iraqi Army or Iraqi Police, improving the infrastructure of the city, and working with the local population to address the concerns of daily life in Tal Afar. Each day is a new challenge, but with the cooperation of Iraqi Security Forces, the citizens of Tal Afar, and the soldiers of the Iron Dukes there is no limit to what can be accomplished.



Below, the leader of a TF 2-37 foot patrol in the Sarai district addresses the concerns of a Tal Afar Businessman about unemployment and economic growth in the area.



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2-3 FA REGT "GUNNERS"



"From Snow to Sand"

With a snowy Christmas in the close past and in the memories of many Gunners, Soldiers of 2-3 FA finally deployed with 1st Brigade Combat Team (1BCT), under the operational command of 101st Air Assault Division, to Iraq. It was a hectic month, filled with vacations, holidays, schnitzels and last goodbyes for many of us as 2-3 FA packed up and moved out to Kuwait, in route to Tall Afar, Iraq.

In Kuwait, we established ourselves and awaited the many flights that took us from Ramstein to Camp Buerhing. We eventually all made it safely to the Camp and began our training and final preparations for our push to Iraq. The Camp was a nice surprise for many, due to the numbers of Internet Cafés, phone centers, and even some fast food centers such as Taco Bell and Burger King. Needless to say the transition wasn't all that bad. But after the few weeks of Kuwait's niceties it was on to Iraq.

With the exception of Bravo's Fire Supporters, we all flew in C-130s (large military aircraft) up to FOB Sykes. Our flights were a bit strung out but again, we all safely made it. The temperature is pretty nice right now, with the lows in the 40's and the highs in the 60's. Our area is expected to reach above 120 degrees though in the high of the Summer, so we're enjoying this while we can. A little information about FOB Sykes—we have a nice MWR facility with some basketball courts, TVs, a small movie theatre, a gym, and phones and internet connections in addition to a recreation room. It's pretty crowded right now, but will quiet down once the unit we're replacing heads out and we take control of the area. The dining facility is very good; we're being fed well. Living conditions here at Sykes is containerized housing (one per Soldier), which is again quite nice.

However, many Gunners are located throughout the entire Ready First Operations Area; locations such as FOBs Nimar, Kasik, & the cities of Tal Afar and Rabiya. As I previously mentioned, Bravo Fire Supporters are not collocated with the Ready First, they are working with the Marines in a town called Hit.

What are we doing here? We have an important mission to train Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) at an NCO and Officer Academy as well as continue coalition



Advanced Party Soldiers arrive at FOB Sykes airstrip. Our trip from Kuwait to Iraq was in a C-130.



Sandstorm at a range in Kuwait.

relationships with Iraqi Army and Police at Joint Coordination Centers (JCC) all throughout the northern area of operations. Our mission is crucial; the better job we do, the better the Iraqis will be able to take control themselves and the sooner Soldiers can return home.

Special thanks to all the support from the families and FRG of 2-3 FA. We all appreciate the mail, packages and email. Your support is what keeps us going on a day-to-day basis. Without your constant support we wouldn't be able to complete our invaluable mission. So once again, thank you for supporting us as we complete another tour (for many of 2-3) in Iraq, in support of the Iraqi people.



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16th ENGINEER "CATAMOUNTS"



Adjusting to life in their home away from home



16th soldiers on one of FOB Sykes' nicer days



Stopping a moment to snap a picture in an otherwise busy day

Catamounts Dig-in in Tal Afar

By: 1Lt Orlando

When the 16th Engineer Battalion arrived in Tall Afar, they were greeted by less than friendly weather. It was rainy, cold, and muddy, not what is expected for a desert climate. The Catamounts spent the next few weeks adjusting to this new place and getting to know the way around the area. The right seat ride with 3rd ACR took soldiers out into the area of operations so they could get a first hand look at the roads and villages, while a Blackhawk ride gave them an aerial view of the area. It was not long before the Catamounts began leading missions of their own, taking control of the area in a determined Catamount manner.

The Catamounts assumed the responsibility of engineering support for Tal Afar and the surrounding areas of Sinjar and Al Kisik, as well as the Base Defense of FOB Sykes. A new mission for the 16th Engineer Battalion is the supervision of construction projects to improve the quality of life for the Iraqis living in Tal Afar. A horizontal construction platoon from the 505th Engineers has been added to the Catamounts to assist in this challenging mission. This is not a typical job for combat engineers, but the Catamounts have tackled this mission with the same tenacity as any other.

As 3rd ACR moves out and the skies begin to clear, the 16th Engineer battalion has comfortably settled into its new home in Tal Afar.



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501st FSB "PROVIDERS"



501st FSB soldiers erecting a tent in Tal Afar, Iraq.

Providers Plate Full in First Month on Ground

The Providers have spent the past six months in Germany training and preparing for the challenges we would face in Operation Iraqi Freedom 05-07. We began our journey with the Ready First Combat Team by deploying to Kuwait where we conducted an RSOI and some high speed training to further increase our readiness.

In Kuwait each company focused their training on different aspects of their missions. Alpha Company conducted drivers training on Heavy Equipment Transports and the new LMTV, an armored cargo truck. Bravo Company conducted drivers training and preventative maintenance training on new equipment we would receive, Charlie Company refined their MASCAL plan, Bravo Battery trained on Combat Logistics Patrols (CLP) security, HHC prepared to accept the Brigade Internment Facility mission, and support operations trained on VSATS. In addition, the battalion participated in a three day training exercise culminating in a convoy live fire. Soldiers learned different techniques on how to react to IEDs, ambushes and small arms fire. Upon completion of our training and theater in-processing, we continued our deployment to FOB Sykes in Iraq.

Upon arriving in Iraq we immediately began our Relief In Place (RIP) by linking up with our respective counterparts and gathering as much information about our new area as we could. During the RIP process, we also completed the transfer of equipment from the RSS and conducted drivers training on the new vehicles. HHC conducted non-lethal weapons training and detainee processing procedures. Alpha Co completed the inventory of a 4000 line SSA, CLI point, and CLX storage area to support the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Bravo Co established maintenance operations and developed procedures for new equipment within the brigade. Bravo Battery worked with each company on CLP security procedures. Charlie Co stood up a Level 2 medical facility and began caring for patients immediately. The biggest challenge we had to overcome was the sheer difference in personnel numbers between 3rd ACR's Support Squadron and our own Forward Support Battalion.

During the relief in place the Providers also completed five Combat Logistics Patrols, and stood up logistics enabling direct support to the brigade. The Providers, having faced and overcome challenges and completed the RIP, stand ready to support the soldiers and the units of the Ready First Combat Team.

Providers!



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A/141 SIGNAL “GATORS”



GREETINGS TO THE GATOR FAMILY!

By: CPT CASON GREEN/ISG CALVIN MISTER

Alpha Company Commander/First Sergeant

Greetings from Tall Afar, Iraq. The last month has been a very busy time for the Gators. We had a successful movement into theater, and immediately began our training in Kuwait. After a short stint at Camp Buehring, we flew up to FOB Sykes near Tall Afar, Iraq. Everyone has been working very hard preparing for the mission at hand. First, we received all of our signal equipment and then set up a short exercise to test all of it out. Next, we finalized our signal planning and continued to perform maintenance while simultaneously continuing our MOS training. Now, is time that all of our hard work and dedication over the past year is going to pay off. We are setting up communications that will support the Ready First Combat Team. The Gators are tying into the existing network and continuing to provide first-rate support to all of our subscribers. We have also picked up another mission along the way. A Company is going to be partnered with the 3rd Iraqi Army Signal Company. We are going to instruct and train our new Iraqi friends. By training the Iraqis, they will be able to be self-sufficient in setting up communications here in NW Iraq.

Within only a couple of days, the Gators have settled in to FOB Sykes and made it a home away from home. Morale is high and support here at the FOB is great. The chow hall is excellent, and the gym well equipped. There is no shortage of activities to keep Soldiers busy during their precious relaxation time. We are certain the deployment will go by quickly. We do have some Soldiers stationed at some of the outlying FOBs. The chain of command is absolutely dedicated to providing these Soldiers all of the comfort items that they need for the deployment. Do not worry; they will be safe and well cared for.

A Company has had many exciting professional events so far during the deployment. First Lieutenant Paul was promoted to Captain effective 1 Feb. Staff Sergeant Moore was promoted to Sergeant First Class on the same day. Congratulations to these two key members of the Gator team. Their hard work has paid off and their promotion was well deserved. Private First Class Pringle was promoted to Specialist on 1 Feb. Congratulations to this hard working Soldier! The Gators have been hot on re-enlistment, taking advantage of the tax-free bonus money that is available. SFC Stewart and SSG Martinez both re-enlisted in Kuwait, further solidifying their successful Army careers. SGT Burris then extended his ETS, continuing his commitment to the Army. The Gators have also had some initial-term Soldiers completing their first Re-Up. Congratulations to SPC Raddatz, SPC Mabrey, SPC Freeman, and SPC McMullen. The Gators are dedicated to keep the best and brightest in the Army. We are well on our way! On the home front, congratulations to SPC Strickland and his wife on the recent birth of their healthy baby boy, Maxwell Joel Strickland on 5 February weighing 5 lbs. 13oz and 20 inches long.

Most of all, a heart-felt thank you to all of the spouses back at home for all of the support that you have given the Soldiers. Everything that you do from e-mail to packages to the Super Bowl commercial makes our jobs that much easier. We couldn't do it without you. **IRON GATORS LEAD THE WAY!**



1LT Garipey congratulates SPC Freeman on his re-enlistment for six years!



Soldiers from A/141 SIG conduct a SWITCHEX to test their communications systems prior to Relief in Place.



C-130 drops off soldiers of A Co 141 Sig. and return back to Kuwait.



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Forward Operating Base Sykes

By: SGT Hartman



Watches, movies, and anything else you can imagine can be found at the post bazaar.



Turkish rugs, both manufactured and hand-woven, are sold at the post bazaar.



At the Hollywood Food Complex, soldiers can sample some traditional dishes from the region.

Despite being deployed to the scrubby northern lands of Iraq's Nineveh province, the soldiers of Ready First are never without something to do when they are at Forward Operating Base Sykes. Whether the soldiers live here or are on a periodic visit from an outer patrol base in sector, there is no shortage of places for soldiers to spend their hard earned pay. There is an AAFES run PX, with rows of CDs, movies, and snacks; as well as a Turkish market, a bazaar-like shopping center offering rugs, movies, jewelry, and other knickknacks.

Afterwards, soldiers can dine at the first rate Dining Facility, which offers four meals a day. Whether eating in the Main line, Short order, or Pasta Bar, there is always enough food to feed an army. And if soldiers are still hungry, there is a salad bar offering fruits, salads, and cold cuts. Those wishing to indulge their sweet tooth can choose from a cornucopia of cakes, cookies, puddings and several flavors of ice cream.

If the DFAC isn't serving what they're hungry for, soldiers can also visit the Hollywood Food Complex, which offers some traditional foods from the area.



Soldiers at FOB Sykes live in Containerized Housing Units, or CHU's equipped with air conditioners and beds for either two or four people.



No soldier goes wanting at the Dining Facility on FOB Sykes.



Power Bars and Powdered Gatorade is available for those who might be away from the chow hall awhile.



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BDE Chaplain

Chaplain Mike Wood



Why am I here?

In the Bible, beginning in Genesis chapter 37 is the story of Joseph. Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. His brothers then faked Joseph's death as a cover for their actions...strike one. Joseph did not let the betrayal get him down. He went to work for Potiphar and was soon in charge of his whole household. Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Joseph and when he would not respond, she framed him and had him thrown in prison...strike two. In prison Joseph again rose to leadership. Through God's help he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. When the cupbearer was restored to his former position, he forgot all about Joseph...strike three.

Two years later, Pharaoh had a dream and then the cupbearer remembered Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. Joseph was called to Pharaoh. He successfully interpreted Pharaoh's dream of prosperity and then famine in Egypt and the surrounding nations. Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of preparing for the famine. He promoted him to second in charge of the kingdom.

Ironically, his brothers came to him seeking food because of the famine. He ended up saving the very brothers who had sold him as a slave years earlier. He demonstrated a superior attitude when he said to them, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." (Genesis 50:20)

Now here's the lesson. If anyone ever had an excuse to cop an attitude, it was Joseph. But he never did. He remained faithful and true to his values throughout some very rough times. Though he did not know what the end would be, he trusted that God had him exactly where he wanted him. Joseph bloomed where he was planted. He succeeded as Potiphar's servant and even in the jail. God favored him in every circumstance and ultimately blessed him greatly and used him to save his family and Egypt. If Joseph had quit at any point, he would not have been in position when God needed him.

God is just as intimately involved in our lives as he was in Joseph's life. So when you feel like quitting or copping an attitude, remember that God has a plan for you. You are where you are for a reason. Whether that is in Iraq, Friedberg, Giessen...where ever. God will not send you where His grace cannot keep you.

Chaplain Mike Wood



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CULTURAL CORNER WITH READY 9

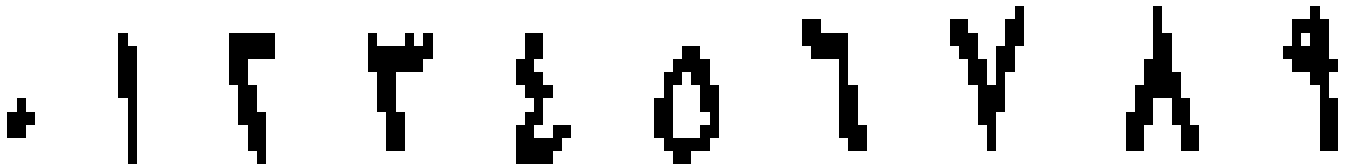
By: CPT Patriquin
"READY 9"



"Iraqi" Numbers

The numbers used by Iraqis are actually technically called "Hindi Numerals" which historically comes from the fact that the Arabs utilized Indian mathematical systems during their historical "enlightenment" period.

These numbers are as follows:



From left to right: Sifr (zero), Wahed (one), Athnayn (two), Thalatha (three), Arba (four), Hamsa (five), Sita (six), Saba (seven), Famanya (eight), Tisa (nine)

As these numbers moved into the Western world, they were slowly changed into the number system we use today, known as "Arabic Numerals". Note the similarity between the numbers 1 (wahed) and 9 (Tisa).

Hindi numerals are also written from Left to Right, just like our numbers. Therefore, as you read Arabic from Right to Left (opposite of English) the numbers are still written from Left to Right. Math is universal!

Ashoura and Arba'een

Right now we are in the period of "Arba'een" (40 in Arabic), which is a forty day period which began on "Ashoura" February 9th. This forty day period commemorates the Martyrdom of Hussein, grandson of the prophet Mohammed, on October 10th 680 in Karbala, Iraq.

The families of Hussein and his soldier's families were marched across the desert to Damascus over a period of 40 days. During this period many of them died. They were then put on display in Damascus as heretics. To commemorate this period, Shi'a muslims observe a 40 day period of mourning lasting until 20 March of this year, when they celebrate Arba'een. On Arba'een, the Shi'a make a large pot of stew, and distribute it to all poor people, regardless of their religion.



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1-1 AD In Iraq- A Month in Pictures

